

NCHE's History's Habits of the Mind

Courses in history, geography, and government should be designed to take students well beyond formal skills of critical thinking, to help them through their own active learning to:

- Understand the significance of the past to their own lives, both private and public, and to their society.
- Distinguish between the important and the inconsequential, to develop the "discriminating memory" needed for a discerning judgment in public and personal life.
- Perceive past events and issues as people experienced them at the time, to develop historical empathy as opposed to present-mindedness.
- Acquire at the same time a comprehension of diverse cultures and shared humanity.
- Understand how things happen and how things change, how human intentions matter, but also how their consequences are shaped by the means of carrying them out, in a tangle of purpose and process.
- Comprehend the interplay of change and continuity, and avoid assuming that either is somehow more natural, or more to be expected, than the other.
- Prepare to live with uncertainties and exasperating, even perilous, unfinished business, realizing that not all problems have solutions.
- Grasp the complexity of historical causation, respect particularity, and avoid excessively abstract generalizations.
- Appreciate the often tentative nature of judgments about the past, and thereby avoid the temptation to seize upon particular "lessons" of history as a cure for present ills.
- Recognize the importance of individuals who have made a difference in history, and the significance of personal character for both good and ill.
- Appreciate the force of the non-rational, the irrational, and the accidental, in history and human affairs.
- Understand the relationship between geography and history as a matrix of time and place, and as a context for events.
- Read widely and critically in order to recognize the difference between fact and conjecture, between evidence and assertion, and thereby frame useful questions

*www.bozeman.k12.mt.us/history/shared/docs/
habitsandthemes/habitsandthemes.html*